



Happy New Year

655 Parfet Street, RM E200C

Lakewood, CO 80215-5505

720-544-2810-P

720-544-2965-F

Highlights

by
Allen Green
State Conservationist



As we enter 2007, there are a few thoughts that I would like to share with you. As always, I would like to personally thank everyone for another great year. Our accomplishments in getting conservation on the ground this past year were once again outstanding. The commitment that our employees, partners, and most importantly the land users of Colorado, have toward the stewardship of our natural resources is impressive.

You may be hearing and reading information about significant budget cuts that could affect NRCS and others. While it is a given that we will be (as we did last year) operating with fewer funds than the previous few years, we have taken a number of steps to minimize the impacts that it will have at the field level. We were anticipating this change in funding levels and were able to put a number of things in place to help prepare for this year. I have been involved in state level budgets for over 17 years, and I have confidence that we can make the necessary adjustments to assure that we have a balanced budget and still deliver the products and services that our customers have come to expect. The best advice that I can give to NRCS employees is to just keep doing the great work that you always do, and enjoy the opportunity to make a difference on the landscape.

While we are in a transition phase with the current farm bill winding down, new leadership in our agency, and changes in leadership in Congress, I can honestly say that

the future for private lands conservation is as strong as ever. Our agency recently completed a new strategic plan that clearly outlined our mission goals and the strategic direction that we will use to help us achieve those goals. We are working in state to finalize a multi-year business plan that matches this strategic direction, along with identifying how we can become more efficient in delivering our services. Recent farm bill listening sessions have reinforced the strong commitment and support for conservation of private lands and the programs and services that our agency and partnership provide.

In closing I hope you had a great holiday season and I look forward to another great year.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allen Green".

inside this issue:

Landowners Urged to Plant	2
One to Grow On	3
Bent County Recovery Assessment	3
In the Know About the Snow	4
Soil Survey Gets Updated	4
News From the Areas	5
Joint Annual Meeting	8
Noxious Weed Workshop	8
San Juan Biodiesel Coop	9
Fort Carson Tree Memorial	9
Costilla Last Acres Ceremony	10
First Grazing School	11
Farm Management Meeting	11
Workshop in Granada	12
State Rangeland Contest	13
SE RC&D Grant Writing Workshop	14
NRCS Emp. Spotlight - Brian Sorenson	15
Techno-Tips	16

Article provided by The I70-Scout
written by Steven Vetter, Staff Writer

photos by Steven Vetter



Left, Sammie Molinaro with the Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Byers answers questions from landowners concerning dryland grasses, including best time to plant them and best types to plant, at a Nov. 4 seminar west of Bennett.

Right, Kent Chrisman of Bennett demonstrates how to seed dryland grasses. Seeding rates, planting processes, and maintenance were discussed during the workshop sponsored by the East Adams and Deer Trail soil conservation districts.

Landowners urged to plant pasture in spring

Local landowners, especially those with small acreage farms, received a quick education on dryland grass seeding and maintaining grassland during a seminar held west of Bennett on Nov. 4, 2006.

"Everything is based on providing grass seed the best environment for germination and establishment..."

Rangeland specialists and agronomists from Colorado State University Cooperative

Extension and East Adams and Deer Trail conservation districts told attendees that dryland grass can be planted between mid-October and late May, but that spring planting is most recommended along the I-70 Corridor.

"Seed planted in the late fall and winter will remain dormant through the colder months and germinate when it warms up in the spring," said Sammie Molinaro, district conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Byers. "But, with winds being a particular concern out here, it's best to wait to plant until the spring months. Working the ground now could lead to significant erosion, because you remove any ground cover that exists and [turned over] top soil dries out and blows away very easy. In addition, you could lose the planted seed that's in that top soil and blown away."

A planting demonstration gave landowners pointers on the depth and rates to seed grass in dryland areas.

"Under normal circumstances, planting seed down to a depth of three-quarters-of-an-inch is recommended. Much deeper and problems with germination can arise," Molinaro said. "Seeding can be done by a variety of methods — from drilling to broadcast seeding by hand — and it's up to each landowner to determine what way would be best based on size of acreage and equipment availability."

Other tips for attaining a successful stand of grass include mulching with hay or straw to conserve moisture, prevent soil compaction and reduce runoff; provide supplemental water if possible for rapid establishment; and plant on land with an established cover crop such as a long-season grain or forage sorghum or broomcorn, sterilized varieties if possible. Many of those crops help push out weeds, also.

cont. on page 17



People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing.. that's why we recommend it daily.

Zig Ziglar

**Dost thou love life?
Then do not squander time,
for that is the stuff
life is made of.**

Benjamin Franklin

Exert your talents, and distinguish yourself, and don't think of retiring from the world, until the world will be sorry that you retire.

Samuel Johnson

**Knowing is not enough;
we must apply.
Willing is not enough;
we must do.**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.

Walt Disney

If you wait until all the lights are "green" before you leave home, you'll never get started on your trip to the top.

Zig Ziglar

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

Henry David Thoreau

You must look into other people as well as at them.

Lord Chesterfield

Bent County Recovery Assessment - *Round One*



Photo of cage with rain gauge



Photo at celebration dinner

As 2006 comes to an end, it also serves as the initial year of the Bent County Recovery Assessment. Family and friends of the project anticipate the publication of its findings and came together to celebrate the project's accomplishments.

This long-term assessment was funded by Colorado's Grazing Land's Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and is specific to Bent County. It is designed to provide data that will help better assess range production, better determine rainfall patterns and responses of native range, as well as demonstrate the response of native range to proper grazing management within drought conditions. It's an ongoing project so data will be generated, collected, tabulated, compared, and analyzed on an annual basis.

The assessment consists of 10 sites within Bent County, each containing two enclosed cages. The cages are constructed so that livestock are excluded, and installed having taken site ecological considerations into account. Selected sites were evenly dispersed to adequately assess the county.

One cage at each site hosts a recording rain gauge and will have its contents clipped yearly at the end of the growing season to determine total annual production. The other cage's contents will be clipped three times per year during the growing season to simulate the effects of proper grazing management on range production. Rainfall will be monitored for the entire year.

During the celebration dinner, Ben Berlinger, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Range Specialist, LaJunta Area Office, outlined the different types of grasses that could be found at different sites while Carlos Earl, Conservation District Farm Bill Technician, Bent County, was also on hand to explain the reason for the different sites.

Rangeland performance information during drought conditions is available across the state, but there was nothing specific to Bent County, and it is one of the counties in Colorado most affected by the current and continuing drought conditions. Bent is located in Southeastern Colorado, and is comprised of 954,461 acres, of which 830,381 acres or 87 % is native range; so this study was very much needed and encouraged and will fill a void that currently exists in the County with respect to forage production on native range.

IN THE KNOW ABOUT THE SNOW



Leon Kot, NRCS District Conservationist, Woodland Park, CO and Mike Gillespie, NRCS Snow Survey and Water Forecasting Supervisor, Lakewood, CO hiked up Hoosier Pass with a dozen 10th grade students from the Denver area to a SNOwpack TELEmetry (SNO-TEL) to demonstrate the different snow measuring procedures.

One of the goals of the field trip was to illustrate and incorporate math skills from the snow survey statistical operations into their lessons.

The Coalition of the Upper South Platte Watershed sponsored the expedition, and Theresa Springer, CUSP Educational Specialist, hosted the week-long session.

SOIL SURVEY AREAS GETTING UPDATED

by

J. P. Pannell

Soil Scientist, Durango Soil Survey Office

For the past several weeks, soil scientists have been working on populating soil data in National Soil Information System (NASIS) that is needed for National Program Application. This involved entering data into the system that had not been populated before, or needed updating to current standards. Older published soil surveys did not have all of the information that is now considered important to arrive at some of the right interpretations. Some of these are: structure of the surface horizon, restrictions, geomorphology (landforms), three-dimensional surface morphometry, slope, shape, aspect, surface fragments, hydric condition, and reason for being hydric for the minor components. Major components usually already had the hydric information.

To complete this task, each Soil Survey Office was assigned seven or eight Soil Survey Areas to work on. Most were areas that are close to the Soil Survey Office but some were remote. The Durango Soil Survey Office did the La Plata, Archuleta, Animas-Dolores, Ute Mountain, Larimer, Boulder, and Summit Soil Survey Areas.

After the data was entered into NASIS for an area, validations that are built into the system for each kind of entry were run against that area. This finds any errors or missing data that can then be corrected. After an area is completed, it will then be posted to the Soil Data Mart.

on the pulse

Area Office News

Area One



2 Turkeys – 1 Day The Grand Junction Service Center celebrated their annual “turkey day” on November 21st. This year we not only honored the traditional turkey roasting but we also “roasted” *Ryan Altenburg*, agriculture engineer of the Grand Junction Field Office (FO).

Louis Hartbauer, Civil Engineer Technician, Grand Junction FO provided the turkey while the remainder of the service center employees providing the supporting cast of food characters and helped with the table arrangements and decorations.



Ryan is leaving us for other opportunities outside the Federal Government but we wanted him to leave in a safe manner!



Above Ryan is presented with an “air horn” for his Dodge truck! Look out Carl!

When sending out emails Ryan has always ended his emails with the following quote: “If I died tomorrow it would all be a waste because I never got to _____”. You fill in the blank.

We helped filled in the blank for him and left post-it notes throughout his office with our responses.



Ryan is leaving us with a smile and lots of friends who will really miss him. We wish him well in his new career. Good ride, cowboy – good ride!



Bookcliff, Mount Sopris, South Side Conservation Districts hosts Ag-day Jan 31, 2007.

Area Two

John Fusaro, Range

Conservationist, Ft. Collins FO, *Jeff Burwell*, State Resource Conservationist, Lakewood, SO, and personnel from NITC and ARS met with *Merlyn Carlson*, the Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment. The purpose of the meeting was to illustrate the ongoing work and partnerships for the field office, IT, and research.



Jake Frank and Mike

Nelson of the Colorado Division of Wildlife put on a field day to show how they develop springs on the Cherokee Park State Wildlife properties. The session was attended by local ranchers, DOW, NRCS, and City of Fort Collins Natural Areas personnel.

A detailed power point presentation was made to compliment a working display model of the system and followed up by a field visit to look at two of the spring developments.

Area Three



Laura Craven, Woodland

Park Soils Office, took three students out in the field for hands-on field training. *Marie Schmidt* (seen above) is a student from Wisconsin, who worked as a soil scientist in Montrose this past summer. She spent a week working with Laura.



(L-R) *Candace Hubbard*, Pueblo field office SCEP, and *Lana Armon*, Colorado Springs office SCEP were also in attendance.

The Teller-Park Conservation District and Woodland Park NRCS office sponsored a weed tour in Park County this fall. The tour served as the district's annual meeting.



Jane Wustrow, Sangre

de Cristo RC&D

Coordinator, received the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension (CSU CE) Friend of Extension Award at their fall banquet.

Several CSU CE staffers nominated Jane for her work as the coordinator for the Upper Arkansas River Weed Management Cooperative, her work in the community and economic development arena in her RC&D area, and her encouragement to the counties in her area to work with CSU CE's Technical Assistance Program to help conduct a GIS Users' Survey. The above photo shows *Marc Johnson*, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at CSU, presenting Jane with her award.

Jane was also recognized by the Colorado League of RC&D Councils in Glenwood Springs. Jane received the League's "Outstanding Performance by an RC&D Coordinator" award.

Congratulations on these two honors, Jane!

Kathy Trujillo, Sangre de Cristo RC&D, received the Colorado League's "Outstanding Performance by a Program Assistant" award in Glenwood.

Congratulations, Kathy.

Other Area 3 RC&D

awards received in Glenwood included:

- 1) Outstanding Performance by a Council—Southeast Colorado RC&D,
- 2) Outstanding Sponsor Achievement—Seibert Action Committee (East Central Colorado RC&D),
- 3) and "President's Award"—Gary Ensign, East Central Colorado RC&D.



Patty Moore, wildlife biologist in the Pueblo field office, had a very noteworthy passenger on a recent trip to the Lamar Colorado Division of Wildlife office. "Rudolph" was a big hit with many travelers on Highway 50 that day.

The Salida field office has been working with the Chaffee County Cattlemen's Association and the Chaffee County Ranchlands Project on land use issues in

Chaffee County. The groups held land use workshops to help Chaffee County citizens plan for future land uses and development patterns in the county.

The Salida field office also helped with a forum on the Guidestone brand of community-supported agriculture. The Guidestone goal is to help initiate a cooperative of local farmers to distribute meats, fruits, and vegetables to locals at weekly markets.



September 27th FFA Chapters in the Southeast District gathered at Pritchett for a Rangeland Judging Contest.

Teams performed plant identification, estimated range trend and health, and selected possible management options to address the given situation. The *Vilas team* took first place, *Wiley* came in second, *Pritchett* ranked third, and *Walsh* placed fourth.

NRCS staff that put the competition together included *Ben Berlinger*, Area Rangeland Management Specialist; *Tim Steffens*, Multi-County Rangeland Management Specialist; *B.J. O'Doherty*, Soil Conservationist; and

Michael Daskam, NE Prowers D.C.



Area 3 recently held its FY06 Awards Luncheon/Program at the Crowley County Heritage Center in Crowley. The Southeast Colorado RC&D helped restore the Heritage Center when *Bob Appel* was the coordinator.

The Washington Elementary Storytellers from Rocky Ford provided entertainment. *Levi Montoya* gave a Native American presentation also.

ORGANIZATIONS HOLD JOINT ANNUAL MEETING

by Carol Sirko Dunn



The Upper Huerfano Conservation District, the Huerfano County Farm Bureau, and the Huerfano Basin Stockgrowers held their

joint annual meeting of the membership on Saturday, November 11, 2006 at Sammie's Restaurant in La Veta.

A few years ago, the organizations decided to try combining their annual meetings into one event because many of the same people needed to attend all the separate meetings.

The experiment worked. The joint annual meeting avoids duplication of effort and saves the three organizations money that would otherwise be spent on three separate luncheons, music groups, floral arrangements, door prizes and so forth.

Agricultural producers who are too busy to attend three separate annual meetings can now participate in one larger gathering. Most of the attendees know each other, so it's a good time

for catching up on old friendships and making new ones.

The highlight of this joint annual meeting was honoring Donald Sanchez for 28 years of service to the land and people of Huerfano County. Sanchez, a soil conservation technician with the Natural Resources Conservation Service for 43 years, has announced that he will retire in January, 2007. Practically everyone in attendance had worked with Sanchez at one time or another, so this was a fitting group to honor his career in Huerfano County.

Congrat's Johnny V



John Valentine, recent retiree, was named one of three recipients of the **"2006 Super Supervisor"** Award from the Association for Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture (APDA).

Each year during National Disability Employment Awareness Month, ADPA recognizes a select number of USDA supervisors, nationwide, who have made special and noteworthy efforts to recruit, hire, accommodate, mentor, or assist USDA employees with disabilities and/or to support disability issues.

Bobby Castle, soil conservation technician in Colorado Springs, nominated John for this award. John was unable to attend the awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., so Allen Green, NRCS State Conservationist, Lakewood, CO presented the award to John at the recent Area 3 awards program/luncheon.

NOXIOUS\$ WEED TOUR WORKSHOP

Sylvia Hickenlooper, NRCS Soil Conservationist, Brighton CO, along with the West Adams and Platte Valley Conservation Districts and the Adams County Weed District hosted a Noxious Weed Tour Workshop for residents of Adams, Boulder, and Weld Counties. The workshop provided the opportunity for participants to see different noxious weeds typical of the area and to learn about methods used to control the highly invasive species. Attendants were also encouraged to bring weeds from their properties to be identified and their control methods addressed.

The workshop was a success with 28 participants. Everyone commented that the information they received during the noxious weed tour workshop would be valuable in assisting them in better management of their properties.

San Juan Biodiesel Cooperative

The Dove Creek Field Office office continues to work with the San Juan Biodiesel Cooperative (SJBC) in its efforts to start a biodiesel production facility in Dove Creek.

Oilseed crops grown locally would be converted at the production facility to biodiesel and then mixed at the complex to the standard 20% biodiesel, 80% diesel blend. The resulting fuel will be sold within a 200-mile radius of the plant. 100% biodiesel can be burned in any standard diesel engine; it burns cleaner and has better lubrication properties; however, it gels readily in winter temperatures and that is why it is blended at the 80/20 rate.

Since the last sunflowers were grown in Dolores County over 20 years ago, the Dove Creek FO and the Dolores County Extension are evaluating new varieties and production techniques for grower information and education. Last spring approximately 2,900 acres were planted in Dolores County.

While some acreage was affected by the lack of soil moisture at planting and the onslaught of rabbit, elk, and deer damage, the crop has performed well. In side by side comparisons to pinto beans (the preferred crop of the area), sunflowers have generally thrived during the drought this growing season, while pinto beans have failed.

Initial dryland yields are ranging from 900-1,300 pounds per acre, which is exceptional given the lack of moisture received. Irrigated yields look to be in the 2,800-pound range. Samples from every truckload are being collected and sent for oil content analysis.

The SJBC has recently reorganized to the San Juan Biodiesel LLC and they have started their capital campaign to raise the funds necessary to construct the plant at the Dove Creek business park. When built, it will be the first 100% sunflower biodiesel plant in the country.

Fort Carson Tree Memorial

by Shelli Mader



Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Americans are continually reminded of the sacrifices that military men and women make each day. Board members from the El Paso County Conservation District – located in Colorado Springs near Fort Carson, the largest army base in Colorado - are keenly aware of the sacrifices that soldiers make.

To honor Fort Carson soldiers who lost their lives fighting the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, the El Paso County Conservation District has developed a unique memorial plan.

The Fort Carson Memorial Tree Grove, the innovation of board president John Bradshaw, is slated to be housed on the Fort Carson Army Base. The district plans to plant a pentagon-shaped tree grove there with 77 trees.

"The theme of the grove is 'Not Forgotten,' to remind soldiers that we support them," Bradshaw, a retired soldier, said. "We visual-

ize this area as a place for military families and others to come and reflect on our soldiers' sacrifices and the freedom these troops fight so hard to keep."

Over a year ago Bradshaw approach the El Paso County Conservation District Board about the project and upon their unanimous approval, the board approached Fort Carson Base personnel with their plan. After numerous meetings and paperwork, their vision is becoming a reality.

Fort Carson has agreed to provide the acreage for the district's grove – in a prime location that will eventually include a church and a museum. The district plans to partner with conservation districts across the state and plant a grove of 77 trees – one for each conservation district in Colorado. The trees will be evergreen trees, at least 6 inches in diameter. The district also hopes to include a plaque or multiple plaques at the grove to honor districts and individuals who contributed to the memorial.

The El Paso County Conservation District is currently in the final planning phase of the project. They have the full support of base personnel, CACD, and NACD. The district is set up to only accept donations to the memorial made through the CACD. The district hopes to begin planting trees for the memorial in the spring of 2007.

"We want this memorial to be an everlasting reminder of conservation districts' appreciation and support of the men and women bravely serving our country," Bradshaw said.

It Took 52 Years...

"I was on the soil conservation board 52 years ago, and that's when we realized that a soil survey was needed for Costilla County," said Gerald Mathes, President, Costilla County Soil Conservation District. "I'm proud to be here to get to see it finally completed."

September 21, 2006 marked the date of the completion of the Costilla County initial Soil Survey.

"I've been involved with this project for eight years," said Alan Stuebe, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Scientist/Project Leader, Costilla County. "But in that short period of time, this project and the folks supporting it have become very special to me and I was dedicated to seeing it come to fruition."



(L-R) Gerald Mathes and Allan Stuebe digging last hole of survey

...but It Was Worth the Wait

Soil Surveys are vital to all communities as the quality of soils describes the capacity of soils to sustain plant and animal productivity, maintain or enhance water and air quality, as well as support human health and habitation. In a nut shell, soil survey can guide individuals and communities in deciding what should and shouldn't be done on a particular soil. They help farmers and ranchers, appraisers, home buyers, land use planners, engineers, developers and so many more.

"I must admit that in my 28 year career, this project also has special meaning for me as well," said Steve Park, NRCS Major

Land Resource Area (MLRA) Leader/State Soil Scientist. *"Although I have been involved with many final acre ceremonies in New Mexico and Texas, this is my first as State Soil Scientist of my native State of Colorado. Soil survey's are the foundation of everything we do in NRCS and in conservation planning. Soil surveys help to ensure 'High Quality, Productive Soils' for the nation, which is the first foundation goal identified in our newly developed 2005-2010 national strategic plan see this survey completed."*

The last acre ceremony was hosted on Ernie Hara's property, a local Costilla County landowner and long time supporter of the soil survey. *"I was more than happy to host the ceremony,"* states Ernie. *"I built my first house 10 years ago and I used information from NRCS and the soil survey to help me make sound decisions on my property. Besides, Alan and I have been working together for many years now."*

"Again, I've only been in the area for about eight years now, but have grown to know and befriend many of the landowners

"Congressman John Salazar expresses his regret for not being able to attend personally; he's in Washington. Mrs Salazar, also sends her regrets, but she is in the field harvesting potatoes today."

cont. on page 17

First Grazing School Held in Logan County

by Terry Ann Sturgeon

The Centennial and South Platte Conservation Districts along with the Sterling USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office hosted the first ever grazing school for local farmers and ranchers in Logan County. The six week grazing school began October 10, 2006, and ended November 14, 2006. The school was geared toward grazing land managers and covered topics from how plants grow, to ranch diversification to irrigated pasture management.



The first session, "Remember Your Roots" and "What's My Stocking Rate?" provided an overview of plant ecology and proper considerations for determining stocking rates. "Pumps to Pipelines" was the topic for the second session and it focused on solar energy, water development, and stock tank and pipeline options. Once the basics were in place it was time to begin talking about rotational grazing and the importance of monitoring your rangeland with "Get Your Cows Moving" and "Watch that Grass." Since northeastern Colorado is still experiencing drought conditions, the fourth session was "Drought-Get Through It and Recover." This session focused on how to properly manage now in order to come back strong once the rain starts falling. Session five was all about "Ranch Recreation." Participants learned some diversification ideas along with the tools needed when it comes to finding a niche in alternative enterprises. Grazing Lands Management 101 ended with a windy all day session entitled "Irrigated Pasture Working for You." Participants ended the day with a field tour where they discussed quick and easy monitoring techniques that could be used every day.

61 individuals from five different counties attended the class. **The presenters included:** Dawn Jackson, District Conservationist, Sterling, CO; Terry Ann Sturgeon, Rangeland Management Specialist, Sterling, CO; Dan Moreno, Soil Conservation Technician, Sterling, CO; Jerry and Jarrod Kuntz, Kuntz Pump and Well Service, Sterling, CO; Gene Fultz, Rangeland Management Specialist, West National Technology Support Center, Portland, OR; Dave Miller, District Conservationist, Rock Ford, CO; Boyd Byelich, Multi County Range Specialist, Fort Morgan, CO; and Bruce Anderson, Forage Specialist University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE.

BCCD Farm Management Meeting

by Misty George



Baca County Conservation District (BCCD) hosted a farm management meeting for local producers on November 27, 2006.

The seminar, held at the Longhorn Steakhouse, was well attended by 24 farmers and ranchers.

After dinner, Doug Stucky, an Agricultural Economist from the Kansas Farm Management Association (KFMA) spoke of the necessity of accurate

record keeping systems, tracking trends, and better marketing strategies. Stucky said, "KFMA members have the benefit of assistance with all of these matters, as well as whole farm profitability analysis, on-farm visits with an Ag Economist, tax planning, and tax management." He also reported that "KFMA works with Kansas producers, as well as producers in the Colorado counties of Baca, Prowers and Kiowa."

To illustrate his points, Stucky shared the latest farm data from 2005 for the 98 farms and ranches in the Southwest Kansas region of the association. The dataset was broken down by net income into three categories: **1)** the high 25% of farms, **2)** average farms, and **3)** the low 25% farms.

One of the most interesting points was that there was a small difference in expense per acre between the three categories of farms. There was very little difference between the yields of crops grown, and yet the

cont. on page 17

Pratt Workshop held in Granada

by Misty George

"It's so easy to get caught up in the work at hand that you forget to make wise management decisions along the way."



Numerous Conservation Districts within Southeastern Colorado joined forces to bring Dave Pratt of Ranch Management Consultants to the area to conduct a hands on workshop with local landowners. Sponsors and supports included BCCD, STAR Bootstraps, Northeast Prowers, Bent, Branson-Trinchera, Cheyenne, and Kiowa Conservation Districts, along with the Colorado Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

The featured speaker, Dave Pratt, has worked with livestock producers in 40 states, as well as Canada, Mexico, Australia, Africa and several South American countries. Pratt helps producers become more economically and environmentally sustainable.

At the October seminar, Pratt discussed business principles that can help ranchers evaluate their operations, make informed management decisions that increase profit, improve their quality of life, and improve their effectiveness as managers.

He discussed the importance of working **ON** the business (strategic level decision making) versus working **IN** the business (day-to-day operations). *"It's so easy to get caught up in the work at hand that you for-*

get to make wise management decisions along the way. Time spent on management decisions can yield as much as \$100 per hour, because it structures the business for success, while just doing the manual labor at hand usually just yields laborer wages," says Pratt.

To illustrate this principle, participants were asked if it was possible to be 100% efficient and 0% effective. Pratt described efficiency as "doing things right," and effectiveness as "doing the right things." *"If we are working hard at doing the wrong things, we will only go broke faster,"* Pratt goes on to say.

The second major topic of the day was "Gross Margin Analysis." Pratt used a diagram to explain that there were only three ways to increase profit in any business:

- 1) **Increase the gross margin** - The difference between the total value of production from the enterprise and the variable (or direct) costs.
- 2) **Decrease overhead costs** - Those expenses associated with land and labor.
- 3) **Increase turnover** - Carrying capacity.

Dave provided an evaluation "tree" to help people identify the most limiting factor affecting business profitability, and some production and economic benchmarks to compare their businesses to some of the most profitable ranches in the country. He explained that if the gross margin is not positive, adding additional units of production will not help pay overhead costs, and would thus be economically unwise.

"If overheads are too high, they need to be reduced. Additional animals will typically not result in a positive gross margin, if fields are already fully stocked. If both gross margin per animal and overheads are acceptable, a producer needs to increase carrying capacity to improve profits," Pratt adds.

Finally, attendees participated in a brainstorming session to structure a business for drought, and key management actions during drought conditions.

Eastern Colorado State Rangeland Contest

by Carol Slusser



It had been four years, since Akron, Colo. held the Eastern Colorado State FFA Rangeland Judging Contest. But on October 4, 2006, Akron hosted the main event. The contest was coordinated by Flagler FFA, Washington County and Cope Conservation Districts and facilitated by Blake Hendon, District Conservationist, Akron, CO; Ben Berlinger, Area Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta, CO; and Nick Trainor, Range Conservationist, Greeley, CO.

There were 91 students in attendance from 12 FFA Chapters, including Akron, Arickaree, Branson, Flagler, Idalia, Kim, Liberty, Merino, Stratton, Vilas, Wiley, and Wray. After a four year lapse the Akron NRCS office was glad to have the contest back in Akron

and hopes to be added back to the three year rotation.

The students compete in two categories. They were first tested on their abilities to identify plants. During this test, they were to properly identify 50 mounted plants, and determine if they were perennial, biennial, or annual. They also were judged on their ability to recite grazing responses, decreasers, increasers, invaders and finally, the plant season of growth.

The second category consisted of range-judging of five possible range sites. Students for this portion of the contest were required to identify the proper range site, plant composition, range condition, basal cover, palatable forage, usable forage, acres per animal-unit-month, trend, and possible range improvements.

Numerous team awards were presented in addition to individual awards which included overall winner in Range Judging and Plant Identification, Barrett Sikes from Kim High School. Ben Berlinger, representing Colorado Section of Society for Range Management,

awarded Barrett with a \$100.00 check and a belt buckle for his achievement.

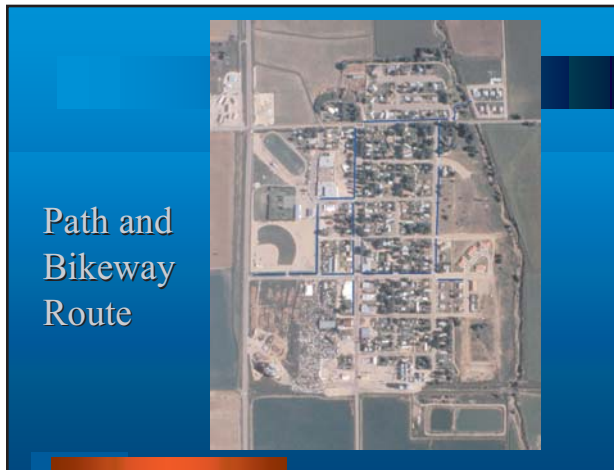
Second place individual went to Kaitlyn Lingus from Branson High School, and third place was awarded to Josiah James from Liberty School.

Kory Kessinger, Washington County Board Supervisor, presented North American Wildland Plants field guides donated by Cope and Washington County Conservation Districts to each school that was represented for the contest.

Sponsors for the day were greatly appreciated. Their contributions afforded the opportunity to purchase plaques, ribbons, use of buses, morning break, and many other necessities.

Sponsors included: Akron and Wray High Schools, buses; George's Jewelers; Haxtun Conservation District; Morgan Conservation District; West Greeley Conservation District; and landowners Leland Dale and Dale Schmidt.

Southeast RC&D Assists in Grant Writing Workshop



Southeast Colorado RC&D became involved in TEA-21 project to provide training in grant writing techniques for the town leaders of Wiley, Colorado.

Phase 1 of the project developed the plan for a network of concrete-surfaced pathways, sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the town. The network has been designed to facilitate the movement of pedestrians, cyclists, and skaters on routes that are safe, smooth, and Americans with Disabilities Association (ADA) accessible.

The completed route will provide a pathway around town that is approximately one mile long, and will establish routes between the business district, residential areas, and the school baseball and soccer fields. This network also creates an inviting corridor that welcomes out-of-town visitors.

Phase 2 of the project has been the construction of this network in the town of Wiley, that began with the the successful receipt of the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) grant for \$190,000.

The Town of Wiley has matched this CDOT grant with a \$72,930 contribution, to bring the total project cost to \$252,930. Southeast Colorado RC&D provided significant guidance in the submission and receipt of this grant that has been matched by a huge community effort by the Town of Wiley.

NRCSer helps judge San Isabel FFA Rangeland Contest



The San Isabel Future Farmers of America (FFA) rangeland judging contest was hosted by the Las Animas High School FFA Chapter on October 11, 2006.

Several area three representatives were on hand to assist, including: Kimberly Diller, NRCS Rangeland specialist, Canon City; Ben Berlinger, NRCS Area Rangeland Management Specialist, LaJunta; Charity Spady, Conservation District Farm Bill Administrative Clerk, Las Animas; and Carlos Earl, Conservation District, Farm Bill Technician, Las Animas.

Numerous Colorado towns with FFA Chapters were represented in the contest including La Junta, Kim, Branson, and Silvercliffe. Some 20 students participated in the event. Contestants were asked to identify (by common name) 30 key rangeland plants along with thier important characteristics such as origin, longevity, season of growth, and palatability.

Additionally, the students visited a field to test their abilities to identify ecological sites, determine rangeland condition and trend, estimate carrying capacity, and recommend appropriate rangeland management practices.

Kaitlyn Lingus of Branson and Avery Hollingsworth of Kim were awarded with first and second place honors, respectively. Lingus was also recognized for her outstanding achievements in youth rangeland activities and received a belt buckle from the Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management.

NRCS Employee Spot Light

more than meets the eye



MY FLYING ADVENTURES

by Brian Sorenson, District Conservationist
Delta, Colorado

On silent wings I have soared with eagles riding thermals converging from the lofty mountain tops. I have traversed deserts, canyons, and remote expanses of rugged landscapes being as one with nature's elements.

My flying adventures began back in 1978 when

watching a movie about these crazy hang glider enthusiasts down under in Australia. Oh, I

had seen hang gliding before but it typically involved jumping off a hill or skiing down a ski run strapped to a swing seat with Dacron sail overhead for a short glide down to the bottom.

At that time this did not impress me much. Why would anyone want to go to

all the time and effort to set up a flimsy glider for a few seconds of airtime? But what I saw that day was different. These blokes down under were staying aloft for hours on end riding the air currents coming off the Pacific Ocean. I was awestruck and decided right then I had to do this thing called soaring.

like that, he loaned me his old standard rag wing. We loaded up the contraption on my truck and I headed out to Antelope Island (a popular local soaring site). I got all set up and confidently launched from a 200-foot hill. Now, I knew nothing about the technique of the sport, so needless to say, that was an interesting

The look on their face as they rounded the corner seeing me dangling from the trees...priceless!

Shortly after I made up my mind, I met a local pilot who I would occasionally watch fly, and the more I watched the more I became inspired. I asked if there was a way I could learn how to do what he did, and just

experience. However, I walked away unscathed but with a few bruises to my confidence as well as to the rag wing.

I ended up putting that contraption back together with a few pop rivets and duct tape and headed out

cont. on page 16

for another attempt. This time it was a successful flight, all 15 seconds of it. The experience and sound of the air flowing over the sail as the earth floated away beneath me was pure ecstasy. **I knew what it was like to fly like the birds and I was hooked.**

It was time for some lessons and my own gear, my own custom glider with my favorite color pattern. Taking hang gliding lessons is in a sense a lot like learning how to ski, just a lot more rigorous and much less fashionable.

During the twenty years and three gliders, I have flown soaring over most of the major mountain ranges throughout Utah, Northern Arizona, and northwestern Colorado.

In hang gliding you learn how to read the weather and air current patterns and resulting cloud formations. You develop an understanding of what aspects of the landscape and topography are conducive to generating thermal lift, the life-giving element of sustained flight and soaring.

Because the sport of hang gliding is perhaps the most elemental form of non-powered flight. It has its risks; however, with good judgment and common sense these risks can be calculated and minimized. I have, however, pushed the envelope a few times.

Once, I flew during what I term as marginal conditions. Long story short, I ended with me making beautiful soft cushiony landing with no damage to me or the glider. I did however have to land in a shrub of trees and was stuck hanging until a passing motorist happened by. ***The look on their face as they rounded the corner seeing me dangling from the trees...priceless!***

I have also had my experiences with eagles, hawks and turkey vultures. The air is their domain, after all. Let's just say, some times they look at you curiously as to say, "*what kind of bird are you anyway,*" and other times they are a bit more confrontational as if to say, "*hey, this is my block and you're not welcome.*"

The latter was the case one day while soaring, when I saw in the distance an object rapidly closing in directly in front of me. Then all of a sudden this object whooshed past me. I turned my head and looked behind me only to see a large yet beautiful Red Tailed Hawk turning and coming straight for me; again, at a high rate of speed. ***The look on MY face...priceless.***

Perhaps one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of my involvement in the sport of hang gliding has been in achieving the art and technique of soaring. This is an acquired skill that takes many hours of mountain flying to master.

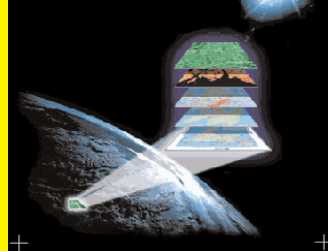
There is nothing more exhilarating than launching from a 10,000 foot mountain peak and finding that elusive thermal, feeling out its characteristics (size, strength and direction of travel) and becoming as one with it, circling and adjusting to its mannerisms as do the birds.

It has been nearly a decade since I graced the skies in a hang glider. I have since embraced general aviation with the acquiring of my pilots license and committing a lot of time to restoring and flying vintage aircrafts. Today, I fly a vintage 1956 Cessna 182 which I painstakingly and lovingly restored over a three year period.

I enjoy flying, it is one of my passions and my faithful dog Keote usually accompanies me on every flight.

Techno-Tips

the one stop source of
natural resources data



NRCS Gets Moving to Improve Water Quality

Conserving and improving the efficiencies of Colorado's liquid gold is the driving force behind the adoption of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Mobile Irrigation Labs (MIL).

Mobile Irrigation Labs are just that: they are specialized labs on wheels that evaluate the effectiveness of irrigations systems and then generate information so that recommendations can be made to make those systems more efficient.

NRCS in Colorado is slated to add two MILs to help in its effort to assist Colorado landowners conserve water and improve irrigation effectiveness. The two labs will be placed on either side of the state: one will be stationed in Montrose, while the other will be housed in La Junta.

Some MILs devices help measure crop conditions, determine actual moisture intake rates, and measure salinity levels within soils. Understanding these elements and having this kind of detailed information about one's field can help generate recommendations to landowners that will help the reduce runoff or fertilizer and pesticides, reduce soil erosion, increase crop production, lower energy costs, reduce plant disease, and in many cases, save time.

Land Owners Urged, cont.

"Everything is based on providing grass seed the best environment for germination and establishment — moisture, protection from wind, and an easy ground surface to emerge from," said Thad Gourd, agronomist and small acreage specialist with CSU Cooperative Extension in Adams County. "Weeds also need to be taken care of because they are aggressive thieves of water and soil nutrients and can really hamper grass emergence and growth."

Established Grass

Once a pasture is established, Gourd said landowners must carefully maintain it, including keeping weeds from getting established and refraining from overgrazing it.

"Grazing is a great management tool, but it can't be overdone, or else you are back where you started," Gourd said.

"Rotational grazing or extended rest periods are suggested. Also, if possible, differing up the types of animals on the land is helpful — for example, sheep and goats prefer broad leaf plants before going after grasses, but horses and cows will go with the narrow leaf grasses first. This information is handy to keep in the back of your mind."

In terms of weed management, small ruminants provide a good "mowing service," according to Gourd. In addition, he suggests use of chemicals to get rid of weeds. "Biological controls are available and effective, but usually are only a temporary fix," Gourd said. "Some chemicals, for example Tordon, are longer-term management tools that are safe to both the environment and people, especially when label directions are followed. The only thing to watch out for is the potential danger to trees or other plants

that may come in contact with some chemicals."

Cheryl Wailes, manager of the East Adams and Deer Trail conservation districts, urged landowners to take advantage of information and expertise from NRCS, Cooperative Extension and the conservation districts when making grass seeding decisions.

"That's what we're here for. The more time and effort that's put into the process, the better your chances of having a sustainable pasture that will last for years to come," she said.

Last Acre, cont.

in this community," Stuebe goes on to say. "As a matter of fact, the first hole I dug when I got here to work on the project was directly to my left near the house Ernie used to live in, so we've come full circle."

The entire project encompasses some 790,000 acres and three towns including San Luis, Ft. Garland, and Blanca. There was support for this project within every town, numerous conservation districts, public and private entities and organizations, as well as political supporters.

"Congressman John Salazar expresses his regret for not being able to attend personally," said Alonzo Payne, San Luis Valley Regional Director for Congressman Salazar. "He's in Washington, but he wanted to be represented at such an important occasion to show his support for NRCS as the agency plays a critical role in the support of farmers and ranchers. Mrs. Salazar also sends her regrets, but she is in the field harvesting potatoes today."

"Senator Salazar also extends his support for this ceremony, our farmers and ranchers and sends his regrets for not being

able to personally attend as well. He too is in Washington D.C. today," stated Charlotte Bobicki, San Luis Valley Regional Representative for Senator Salazar.

"This is another historic milestone in the history of the Colorado Soil Survey Program, a program that began with the early reconnaissance soil surveys of the Lower Arkansas Valley and the San Luis Valley areas in 1902," Park goes on to say. "We are nearing the completion of soil surveys on private lands in Colorado. Barring any unforeseen setbacks, we should have complete digital soils coverage for all private lands in the State, with the exception of Denver County, by the end of 2007. The completion of this survey, which by the way was completed a year in advance, only helps us reach our overall statewide goals as well as our national mission which is to help people help the land."

BCCD Farm Mngt. cont.

high 25% of farms had a crop value per crop acre: \$19 higher than the average farm, and \$28 higher than the low 25% of farms. This data seemed to strongly indicate that the difference between these farms was in the marketing strategy utilized to sell the same commodities. Another interesting point brought out in the analysis was the fact that in 2005, the farms in the high 25% had beef as part of their operation.

Thank you to Farm Credit of Southern Colorado for providing the meal and Southeast Colorado RC&D for their assistance.